

A Proceedings Model for Political Science Publication

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Here are some problems that I, and many others it seems, have noticed about conventional journals:

- Authors whose papers are put under review face tremendous uncertainty and variance in the amount of *time* they will face under peer review;
- The results of peer reviews are highly *variable in quality, content, and judgments*, likely owing to the fact that one typically receives *only two or three reviews* for a paper;
- Editors have a *hard time getting scholars to do peer reviews* at all, much less in a *timely* fashion.

My thought is that these and some other problems could be addressed through a type of “proceedings” publication model. The model centers on using *workshop discussions* as a peer review mechanism. It builds on the experience of a few workshop series in political science, including the pioneering Contentious Politics Workshop run by Chuck Tilly, the long-standing CAPERS and WGAPE workshops, and then more recent CCVW, EGAP and NEWEPS workshops.¹ In these workshops, the “emphasis is on discussion rather than presentation”²: all attendees commit to reading all papers in advance, paper authors do not present but rather are given only a few minutes to introduce their papers, and then a full hour is dedicated to open discussion of the paper, with a chair facilitating the discussion. What is remarkable about this workshop format is that, through extended discussion and deliberation, participants bring to light issues that, by my experience at least, would be very difficult to reach by a reviewer operating in a solitary manner.

A proceedings model could use workshops like these as the peer review mechanism. For each workshop, the steps would be as follows:

- A call for papers is issued.
- A jury of ca. 8-10 faculty and graduate students reviews the submissions and selects the papers to be discussed at the workshop.
- Invitations to the workshop are issued to a set of faculty and graduate students who maintain an affiliation with the organization that puts on the workshop.
- At the workshop, editors, with the help of rapporteurs, note key points from the discussion for each paper.
- The editors invite resubmissions and convey key issues that need to be addressed.

¹ “Tilly’s rules”: <http://essays.ssrc.org/tilly/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/tillys-seminar-rules.pdf>

CAPERS: <https://capersconference.wordpress.com/>

WGAPE: <http://cega.berkeley.edu/info/wgape/>

CCVW: <http://conflictconsortium.weebly.com/workshop-your-project.html>

EGAP: <http://egap.org/>

NEWEPS: <https://neweps.org/>

² Cited from the WGAPE website.

- The author resubmits that paper. The editor reviews the revisions, with the option to consult those present at the discussion to assess whether the revisions are satisfactory, perhaps inviting another round of revision. Once satisfactory revisions have been implemented, the paper is published in an online *Proceedings*.

This model addresses all three of the problems sketched in the first paragraph. Of course, the model has its own issues. Here I anticipate a few and propose ways to address them:

1. Scholars would not want to publish here because it is a new outlet.

That is true of any new journal, of course. Overcoming this is a matter of coordination. Presumably *tenured faculty* should be the ones to take the plunge first to build up the reputation of the outlet.

2. The jury exercises tremendous control and could exercise favoritism.

One way to address this would be to have distinct regional workshops and blind review across regions. That is, blinded submissions to a region A workshop could be reviewed by a jury in region B.³

3. Some things can only be said via the conventional peer review format, for example, frank criticisms that would be awkward to voice publicly. Moreover, the workshop format privileges voices of people who are comfortable speaking publicly.

A way to address this would be for editors to solicit private feedback from workshop participants. At the same time, having to voice comments or reflections publicly does create a pressure for coherence that is missing when peer reviewers are working in a solitary manner.

The discussion leaves out logistical details of formatting and publishing manuscripts. My assumption is that these can be addressed, ideally in a manner that does not require working with a commercial press.

Even taking these points into account I am not so naïve as to think that a proceedings model could replace our traditional journals. Rather, I see this as a way to expand the number and nature of available outlets and to do so in a manner that attends to some crucial problems with conventional journals. It is worth keeping in mind that in other disciplines, for example computer science, conference proceedings are viewed as the *more prestigious* outlets for publication relative to conventional journals. As such, there is nothing essential or necessary about conventional journals in serving as mechanisms for determining whose work deserves special recognition.

³ Note that thinking in terms of regions reflects that idea that the workshops are in-person affairs. One could break out of this mold and use a web-based conference format as well, like the CCVW.